

MALDIVE ISLANDS (continued)

2017 September 26 (Mushrooms) Set//4, SS/1			
4002a 20r	<i>Callistosporium luteo-olivaceum</i>	Tricholomataceae	A
4002b 20r	Brain mushroom, turban mushroom, <i>Gyromitra esculenta</i>	Discinaceae	A
4002c 20r	Horn of plenty, black chanterelle, <i>Craterellus cornucopioides</i>	Cantharellaceae	A
4002d 20r	Bay bolete, <i>Imleria badia</i>	Boletaceae	A
4011 60r	<i>Ganoderma lucidum</i>	Ganodermataceae	A
In margin:	Horn of plenty, black chanterelle, <i>Craterellus cornucopioides</i>	Cantharellaceae	A SS Z
	Fly agaric; <i>Amanita caesarea</i>	Amanitaceae	A SS Z

Note: All 3 of these sets from the Maldives carry the same warning on the Colnect website as follows: "Although this issue was authorized by the postal administration of the Maldives, the issue was not placed on sale in the Maldives, and was only distributed to the new issue trade by the Maldives's philatelic agent." I take the choice of words "...acknowledged..." and not "...authorized..." to be a significant distinction, especially since these issues were among at least 690 items issued in 2017 and 1140 issued in 2018. See "Caveat Emptor!" below.

NEW CALEDONIA

2020 September 7 (Mushrooms) Pair			
1268a 140fr	Hairy oyster mushroom, <i>Panus lecomtei</i>	Polyporaceae	A
1268b 140fr	<i>Ryvardenia campyla</i>	Polyporaceae	A
1268 280fr	Printed as a horizontal pair [1268a & b] with central label		

Caveat Emptor!
"Let the Buyer Beware!"

Paul Mistretta BU 1681

For the past several months I have been attempting to "complete" my Mushrooms-on-Stamps database. This has been a rewarding, but very frustrating, effort. Rewarding in that I now have a relatively consistent record of collectable fungus-related items (20,000+ of them). Frustrating for two reasons: first, despite having a very large database I am now, even more than before, aware of its shortcomings; and second, I am now somewhat discouraged by the flood of "illegal stamps" that I have documented, and the degree to which they have infiltrated the hobby.

I started with a database which included records of about 1,100 sets of mushroom-on-stamps (by far the bulk of them legitimate issues), plus postal stationery, Cinderellas ("local posts", stamp-like items including matchbook covers and such) and ephemera (cigar bands, product labels, etc.). Over the last six months of further researching these items my overarching database has more than doubled to 2,600+ listings of sets. And my database of individual items which included about 11,000 individual records of single stamps, etc. now contains 21,000+ items!

In addition to these increases, there was a similar (though not as steep) increase in the number of covers with FDCs or commemorative cancels. The number of cachets which include mushrooms, however, has exponentially increased since I last worked with my file of cachets and cancels. This latter increase has led me to abandon any attempt at cataloging all of the cachets offered for each cancel or FDC.

So, why the big increase?

While attempting to complete records for several issues of which I was aware, but had been unable to document, I stumbled onto a website (golowesstamps.com) which lists a huge number of “illegal” issues in a variety of formats. While most of the issues shown are unrelated to the mushrooms-on-stamps theme, a significant number did relate. It was this site which gave me a formal introduction into the murky world of illegals. Quoting directly from that site will clarify exactly what is considered to be an illegal stamp and will give a basic historical perspective on these “issues”.

“According to the UPU, “an illegal stamp is one that carries the name of a legitimate country or territory, but was not produced or printed by the postal administration of that country, and is not valid for postage anywhere in the world.”...

“The majority of illegal stamps on the market today are modern topical issues. The major production of them started in the mid 90's. They fall in line with British local issues that were being massively produced at the time. These were locals that were and are made for islands that do not have any legitimate usage for them under the guidelines of what genuine locals (like Lundy Island) are. Yet they are still produced because mainly unknowing collectors (usually topical) buy them. There is a very thin line between them and illegal stamps. Small territories and countries with no postal services have been targeted in the same way and by the same people I might add.

“It soon became felt by these now professional fake stamp makers that they could simply start producing stamps using country names of countries with valid postal services and that is just what has and is happening to this day. These producers hide in the shadows of the philatelic world and use a network to move these illegal stamps. Some in the network are prominent high volume stamp dealers and they are located all over the world.”

It is interesting to note that the quote includes specific reference to Lundy Island. From Wikipedia we learn:

In 1969, Lundy was purchased by British millionaire Jack Hayward, who donated it to the National Trust. It is managed by the Landmark Trust, a conservation charity that derives its income from day trips and holiday lettings. As of 2007, the island had a population of 28.

Twenty eight people - and a local postal system? Really? Yup, Lundy for the last 90 years has maintained a genuine local post servicing tourist mail to the rest of the world. As described by Christer Brunström (2013):

... local stamps are now affixed to the front of covers or postcards but on the left hand side. The Lundy rate includes the Royal Mail postage cost which is generally indicated in the form of a meter mark. Thus the rates are the same as those of the Royal Mail plus some five puffin going to the local post.

Golowes (golowesstamps.com) notes a 4-page article by Maria Libera, published in 2016 in Arte di Francobollo of which 2 pages (in paragraph format) lists known countries in whose name illegals have been issued and the U.P.U. circulars in which they are identified. Many of these are countries in Africa and the Pacific Islands, but many other entities such as Russian “Republics” have also appeared as the “issuers” of these items.

In an effort to validate these issues and avoid U.P.U. identification as illegal, many “contracts” have been negotiated with individuals who “represent” a government agency, but often are not authorized to so act. This gives a thin veneer of legitimacy to the issues produced under these bogus contracts.

As a further confusion, many of these sets are cataloged in one or more of what I consider to be the major catalogs of world postage stamps. Scott's, Stan Gibbons, Yvert & Michel all have some of these

items listed, apparently attributing them with another layer of “legitimacy”. There is no consensus among these catalog editors about the legitimacy of these issues. While, historically, this type of issue would have been considered an “album weed” or a footnote item at best, confusion as to the validity of contracts and “officially issued” versus undeclared illegal” status has editors in a very gray area (except for those items clearly declared illegal by the UPU or clearly acknowledged by the official governmental agency responsibly in each country.)

In his writeups Golowes identifies several producers of these illegal items including Stamperija and IGPC (the Inter-Governmental Philatelic Corporation). Most recently he noted a Russian printer in Moscow, TOPNIMARKA.COM, which has come to the fore; apparently advertising many non-existent items which, if ordered, are printed to order. As with all illegals these illegal items have no postal validity.

Below I present an alphabetical listing of stamp issuing entities which are affected by these printers of bogus issues. Unfortunately, simply listing names fails to distinguish between legitimate issues from some of these political entities and the bogus print runs made in their names. I will try to tackle that in my next article. Political entities which I can confirm as having issued mushrooms-on-stamps items are noted with an “**” after the name.

Afghanistan*, Angola*, Argentina, Azerbaijan *, Benin*, Bolivia*, Bosnia, Burundi*, Cambodia*, Cameroun*, Central African Republic*, Chad*, Comoros*, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo*, Republic of Congo*, Cyprus, Djibouti*, Equatorial Guinea*, Eritrea*, Estonia, Gambia*, Georgia, Greece, Guinea*, Haiti*, Iraq, Ivory Coast*, Japan, Kyrgyzstan*, Laos*, Lesotho*, Lithuania, Madagascar*, Malawi*, Mauritania*, Mauritius*, Mexico, Mongolia*, Mozambique*, Myanmar*, Namibia*, Niger*, Paraguay, Portugal, Russian Federation*, Rwanda*, Saudi Arabia, Senegal*, Slovenia, Somalia*, Sudan, Tajikistan*, Tanzania*, Trinidad & Tobago*, Turkmenistan*, Uganda*, Ukraine* United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan*, Western Sahara (Morocco) *, Zambia* & Zanzibar*.

In addition “stamps” from the following have been denounced by the country in which the issuing entity is located: Nagorno-Karabakh or Republic of Mountainous Karabakh and Naxcivan* (Azerbaijanian provinces); Abruka Post, Aegna Post, Aksi Post, Hiiumaa Post, Kihnu Post, Mainland Post, Muhu Post, Osmussaar Post, Prangli Post, Ruhnu Post, Saaremaa Post, Suur-Pakri Post, Väike-Pakri Post, Vonns Post (Estonian Islands); Abkhazia*, Adjara*, Batum*, South Ossetia* (Georgian provinces); Gagauzia*, Pochta PMR, Transnistria*: (Moldova provinces); Republic of Adygea*, Altai Region*, Amurskaya Province*, Russian Artarctica, Republic of Bashkortostan*, Republic of Buriatia*, Republic of Chuvashia*, Republic of Dagestan*, Autonomous Region of Evenkia, Franz Josef Land*, Ingushia, Republic of Ingushetia*, Republic of Ichkeria, Jewish Autonomous Region, Jewish Republic*, Republic of Kabardo-Balkaria*, Republic of Kalmykia*, Kamchatka Region*, Karachevo-Cherkessia*, Republic of Karelia*, Karjala*, Republic of Khakasia, Autonomous Region of Koriakia*, Kolguev Island, Komi Republic*, Kunashir Island, Kuril Islands*, Litke Islands, Mari-El Republic*, Republic of Mordovia*, New Land Island, Republic of North Ossetia*, Novosibirsk Islands, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)*, Sakhalin Region*, Spitsbergen Island, Republic of Tatarstan*, Republic of Tuva*, Republic of Udmurtia* (Internal provinces and regions of the Russian Federation); Akhal Velayat & Balkan Velayat (Turkmenistanian provinces); and, Ukrainian Antarctic Territories, Crimea, Odessa, Uman*, Vinnitsa* (Ukrainian provinces and regions). Also listed are the presumed fictitious entities: Ferr Islands, Island of Freedom, Island of Offences, Lapland, Maniland, Navaland* and PR Tongo.

“Stamps” were also issued for: Chechenia*, Cherkesia*, Crimeia*, Dnister*, Egypt*, Flanders*, Karakalpakia*, Kolyma*, Kosovo*, Lugaras*, Northern Territories [Japan/Russia disputed area]*, Palatine*, Redondo*, Solomon Islands*, Somali Republic*, Ural*, Vostochnaya*, and the “sand dunes”

Ajman*, Fujiera*, and Sharjah & Dependencies*. Four additional ?fantasy issuers are: Chartonia*, Lugares*, Pandora Island* and Personia*.

Of questionable legality are the stamps of Bernera Islands*, Easdale Island*, Eynhallow*, Hampshire Local Post*, Staffa Local Post*, and Surf Islands*.

Summarizing the above information: U.P.U. declared mushroom-related illegals have been issued in the name of at least 46 legitimate stamp-issuing countries, 44 Russian entities, 3 'Sand Dunes', 11 fictitious entities (fantasy items), and 6 questionable entities.

Unfortunately, the story doesn't end there. Closing out her article Mrs. Libera lists approximately 100 additional agencies which have been reported as having unauthorized "stamps" issued in their name and for which paperwork was being prepared in support of having them declared illegal. And she further suggests: "A number of countries who subscribe to the WNS (the WADP Numbering System of the Universal Postal Union) have made known that "stamps" in their name that are circulating on the stamp market other than their authentic and legal stamps that they have had registered in the WNS System, should be considered illegal." [WADP-WNS is the World Association for the Development of Philately which monitors the WNS - the WADP Numbering System. It is well described in Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WADP_Numbering_System]. The system can be accessed at: www.wnsstamps.post.

To put what I have so far discussed in some sort of perspective, many of the illegal items discovered in my internet searches are miniature sheets of 4, 8, 9 & 10 stamps and in a few cases full sheets of 20 stamps. If we assume a conservative average of 4 stamps per item at a very conservative cost of \$5 per item, the cost to a collector attempting completeness of the approximately 10,000 illegals I discovered would be $10,000 / 4 \times \$5 = \$12,500$. And, for that price you would have 2,500 items which have no franking value anywhere in the world and which may not be included in any competitive exhibit.

References:

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